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RUEHVN/AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE PRIORITY 1034
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SEOUL 001270

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [AGMT](#) [KS](#) [KN](#)
SUBJECT: ROKG DISCUSSES BANGKOK SIX AND KIM CHUN-HEE

REF: A. BANGKOK 2202
 [1](#)B. STATE 60901
 [1](#)C. SEOUL 1108
 [1](#)D. STATE 60316
 [1](#)E. SEOUL 911

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) MOFAT DG for Policy Planning Nam Gwan-pyo on April 18 told POL M/C that Seoul was relieved to hear that the six North Koreans had arrived safely in Bangkok (ref a). MOFAT has instructed its Embassy in Bangkok to assist in vetting and resolving the case quickly and quietly. Seoul was positively considering some of the logistics, like whether to provide interpretation services from a South Korean seconded to UNHCR or another method. If asked by the media, the ROKG would reiterate its long-standing position of neither confirming nor denying individual North Korean asylum cases. Pressed on the Kim Chun-hee case (ref c), Nam said that ROKG officials were considering whether to raise the broader concerns about the safety and welfare of anyone forced to return to North Korea at the inter-Korean ministerials later this week. END SUMMARY.

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BANGKOK SIX

[1](#)2. (C) In an April 18 meeting with POL M/C, Nam Gwan-pyo, MOFAT's Director-General for Policy Planning, expressed relief that the six North Korean asylum seekers had safely arrived in Bangkok. He said that he had been somewhat concerned given the involvement of several NGOs and the long

distance the North Koreans had to travel. MOFAT has instructed its Embassy in Bangkok to assist in resolving the case quickly and quietly. Regarding vetting, he said Seoul would extend all assistance. For now, he saw no need for ROKG officials to talk directly with the North Koreans, unless the USG needed it. The ROKG also stood willing to respond to any informational inquiries. It was examining how to best provide interpretation services, perhaps by tasking a South Korean seconded to the UNHCR or finding other skilled personnel. Nam said, however, Seoul probably would not select a diplomat from its Embassy in Bangkok.

13. (C) He had heard that NGOs were involved and foreign media might be aware of the case. Still, he believed that the whole situation should be approached with extreme discretion. If asked by the media, the ROKG would reiterate its long-standing position of neither confirming nor denying individual North Korean asylum cases. The most important thing was to process the case quickly and quietly. Seoul would respect the free will of the North Koreans in regard to where they wanted to resettle.

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IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE CASES

14. (C) Nam noted that the case of the Bangkok Six was different from what had been generally discussed between USG and ROKG officials (ref c). Those discussions had been focused around processing a North Korean who was already in a refugee camp or otherwise in hiding. In this situation, however, the North Koreans directly approached the U.S.

SEOUL 00001270 002 OF 002

Embassy upon arrival. He opined that this was unlikely to escape public attention and might encourage other North Koreans to do the same. After a successful application for resettlement to the United States, conservative media outlets or NGOs might try and instigate other North Koreans to follow suit.

15. (C) To the question of whether many North Koreans might seek resettlement outside South Korea, Nam replied that after recent media coverage of asylum seekers being resettled in Europe, the numbers of applicants had increased. This was relatively surprising because Europe was so far away that some in Seoul had not seen Europe as a viable option. He speculated that crackdowns in China coupled with increasing NGO resourcefulness contributed to a greater flow to Europe.

16. (C) He reiterated that if North Koreans approached ROKG missions and requested asylum in South Korea, Seoul would consider the person a defacto ROK citizen and would help the individual relocate. In the event, however, that a North Korean approached a ROKG mission and asked for asylum in the United States, which he said had not happened yet, Seoul would find it hard to do much beyond referring the person to UNHCR. Seoul would prefer not to contact third country missions directly but rely on UNHCR.

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KIM CHUN-HEE

17. (C) POL M/C informed Nam about USG efforts to encourage governments to follow-up on the case of Kim Chun-hee, also known as Choi Eun-sun (ref d). Nam said that Seoul had raised the issue with Beijing several times and was in close cooperation with UNHCR in China. Pressed further on the need to make the ROKG position clear, Nam said that there were different opinions within the ROKG on timing and method for approaching this issue. It was unlikely that the specific case of Kim Chun-hee would be raised at the inter-Korean ministerials in Pyongyang (April 21-24). However, he hoped that the ROKG side would mention in general terms its concern regarding North Koreans forced to return to the DPRK.

VERSHBOW